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Testimony on HB No. 5473

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify on HB No. 5473.

I am very familiar with problems caused by sexual abuse of children, both as a professional and in my personal life. I do not believe there should be an end date to when sexual abuse can be reported or for which damages can be recovered.

I was a DCF nurse at Riverview Hospital in Middletown. My cottage was for the youngest children, ages 5 - 9. In the time I worked there, I can think of only two children who was not sexually penetrated by age three. The profound disruption that this causes to normal childhood development is the one of the main reasons DCF exists. Most of the children had periods of extreme rage, had no sense of themselves as people--only as objects. Children I cared for DCF were sold for sex, molested repeatedly, and were often psychotic when they came to our locked unit. There was almost no chance they would go on to live normal lives.

I've also worked at Connecticut Children's Place in East Windsor with adolescents. Most of them were sexually abused at young ages. There would almost be no reason for 50% of DCF's residential care (which is currently being cut) if were not for the profoundly damaging effects of sexual abuse.

I am now, and have been employed by DMHAS since 1996. I worked in addiction services, on the women's unit. Most of these women, who had severe addictions to alcohol and drugs--upwards of 90%--had been sexually abused as children. They felt powerless as children and often threatened with harm if they reported the abuse. By the time they came to us at Merritt Hall, they had learned to cope with the disturbing memories by drugging or drinking themselves to near coma daily.

The stigma is even worse for men. Men are least likely to report sexual abuse as children. The idea is so repellent to many men, even psychiatric professionals avoid the topic. Richard Gartner, Ph. D., in his book *Betrayed as Boys*, tells that when first presenting research on the damage done to boys at an APA conference, no organizer wanted to hear the research. He was given the most isolated presentation spot and frequently left off the program. Men are afraid it will reflect weakness, compliance, interest in homosexual activities.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I know. I was married for 27 years to a man I knew for 34 years, most of my adult life. I am now going through the very last, bitter stages of what must be one of the most expensive and acrimonious divorces two middle class people ever battled.

Our marriage was never Ward and June, but was solid enough. My husband drank to excess for the first decade of our marriage. He was easily riled. He was not very open to me, and had few friends. But he did well in school, and is an engineer employed by a state agency. He had been capable of showing affection.

Things changed profoundly when he revealed to me five years ago that he had been sexually assaulted at age 10 or 11. He was then 52, and had never told a single person before. He knew as part of my job I worked with people who had been sexually abused, and also sexual predators. He knew how strongly

sympathetic I was to the damage sexual abuse causes and how I advocated for the abused.

We were both raised in large Catholic families. I had even joked with him about being one of the cutest altar boys of all times. His assailants had nothing to do with the Catholic church. What our ages and our religious background did do, was fail to provide us with a vocabulary with which he could describe the event to his parents or to any adult. Any talk of sex was verboten.

He could not hear me when I agreed with him that he was afraid to tell people because he didn't know the words, he was afraid others would think he was somehow inviting the assault, that he was compliant. He did not want his sexual orientation questioned. Despite all my reassurances, and the several therapists I found for him, once Pandora's box was opened, the evil could not be contained again.

He became increasingly angry with me and our teenaged daughter. He could not sleep. He had stopped drinking, so did not have that to blot out bad memories. To cope with them, he shut down from us and from everyone else.

I don't know what he believes now, but I am reasonably sure I know, since I have seen this in so many patients. He believes that everyone knows, and therefore would like to avoid everyone, and have no relationships with anyone. He hates himself more than he hates his attackers. The people who have borne the brunt of his rage and coldness have been my 17-year old daughter and myself. After countless attempts to help him, using all my resources as a psychiatric nurse, I had to admit defeat. We could not stay in the same house with him any more. I filed for divorce.

Although I was never strictly a traditional wife, stay-at-home mom, I have very traditional ideas about marriage. This is the second divorce in my family EVER and the first in his. Six years ago, I would have found the idea of divorce unthinkable. No matter what.

Our 17-year old daughter is a lovely, exceptionally smart girl. She is a national honor society student, vice president of a 1500-student high school, managing editor of the school newspaper. She is awaiting her final college choices. He has nothing but criticism to heap upon her. He has belittled her for no reason, and attempted to make her feel as bad as he does himself. He also did this to me for years.

His assailants live in comfort, one in a new house, and is also an important figure in a strict religious sect. To my knowledge, they have never been prosecuted for any sexual offenses. I attempted to contact one, because at my most upset, I wanted to let him know how many lives he had destroyed. I sent him an email through work (of which he is part owner) asking him to contact me regarding my husband, whom he knew in middle school. His reaction was storm into the resident state trooper's office and loudly protest he was being "harassed" by me. The note said nothing about the sexual abuse.

My husband was over 50 when he finally found the words to say what had happened to him. I am sure that there are men and women who have never told, or who would have liked to have told what happened to them, but have not.

The anger and coldness my husband shows towards his immediate family is so profound I had no choice but to leave him. The divorce has sapped my life savings. I have spent \$50,000+ in lawyer's fees. The responsibility for being sole caretaker of our daughter, maintaining a job 40 miles from home (which I cannot sell until the divorce is over), the lack of knowledge by divorce lawyers and courts about the effects of sexual abuse, has almost ensured that I will not have a comfortable middle class retirement. My daughter's college funding is still murky. I live in a small Cape in Newington in dire need of repairs & updating. I had no time to do them, I am nearly 60, and cannot afford to pay anyone to do them.

In my case, there is a direct loss of income (I'm on intermittent FMLA now, with a greatly decreased salary), no guarantee of any joint retirement that I thought we were working towards together, my husband's withdrawal as father and husband, which has put almost all of the financial, emotional, and daily maintenance responsibilities for our daughter into my hands. I cannot progress to a higher work level because my outside responsibilities are so great and time consuming. I cannot finish my graduate degree in

nursing (APRN), which I began at Columbia University in 2005 and then tried to finish at St. Joseph's, as I do not have time and focus. More loss of income and status.

These are measurable losses. They come during the most vulnerable part of my life. I am close to retirement, but have a daughter entering college. I have always lived a thrifty, productive, but low key life. My husband lives in a numb, closed world. His assailants go free, and feel no guilt.

And what's worst: sexual predators who attack once are highly likely to repeat the attack. Rape and sexual abuse is an act of anger and power, not lust or sexual attraction.

Who knows if these assailants have done the same thing over and over again? Continue to do it?

I would advise you (and your children) to avoid Ellington, especially some store owners, and members of a strict religious sect in that town, unless you are well prepared to defend yourself,